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ABSTRACT

The liberty of deviation from the dominant word order in Esperanto and the natural languages is considered. Greenberg's classification of the languages according to four criteria, the liberty of word order in Sanskrit, and the norm of grammaticality in a constructed language are considered. Objection is made to St. Clair's argument that word order cannot be free in Esperanto, because it is not free in any natural language. It is contented that Esperanto has a far smaller liberty of word order than Sanskrit, but--except with respect to the prepositions--a far greater liberty of word order than English. The notion that Esperanto is most comparable in its degree of liberty of word order to Latin, Greek, and Sanskrit is criticized. (SW)

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LIBERTY OF WORD ORDER IN ESPERANTO

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I INTRODUCTION

In his article "Universals of word order in Esperanto" Robert St. Clair (1975) argues, largely relying on the findings of Greenberg (1963), that the word order in Esperanto is far less free than the Esperantists traditionally assume. Therefore he largely relies on the findings of Greenberg about the possible dominant word orders in natural languages and the possible combinations of different features of dominant word order. Greenberg pays some attention to the liberty of deviation from the dominant word order, but this aspect of the matter has completely been overlooked by St. Clair, except where he cites some Esperantist authors claiming the "liberty of word order" in Esperanto. And precisely the liberty of deviation from the dominant word order has decisive importance for the treatment of the question, to which degree the word order in Esperanto is "free", i.e. in which cases deviations from the dominant word order are only less frequent and in which cases decisively ungrammatical.

II LIBERTY OF WORD ORDER IN THE NATURAL LANGUAGES

For this question at least as important as the classification of the natural languages according to their dominant word order, treated by Greenberg, is the classification of the natural languages according to their liberty of word order, i.e., for each construction, whether a permutation of the constituents makes the construction only less frequent or definitely ungrammatical. The latter topic has been treated by J. F. Staal. Though he classifies the natural languages in far less detail than Greenberg, he arrives at the following trichotomy: A-languages, with free word order; B-languages, with partially free-partially fixed word order, and C-languages, with fixed word order (p.78). He suspects, that the A- and C-languages are mere ideal types (even in English adverbials move rather freely, and even in Sanskrit--cited by him as the prototype of a language with free word order--in some cases word order can perhaps not be changed without change of meaning (p. 68), but different languages strongly differ in whether they are nearer to the type of A-language or the type of C-language.

Though, as already said, even in Sanskrit there may be restrictions on word order, and especially there is no complete freedom of discontinuity -- though discontinuities occur, like in Latin.

> Ultima Cumaei venit iam carminis aetas:
> magnus ab integro saeclorum nascitur ordo.
>
> (Virgil, 4th Ecloga),

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there are so many cases in which the constituents of a clause can be freely permutated, that Greenberg's classification of the languages according to dominant word order becomes difficult to apply (Staal, p. 57).

Greenberg classifies the languages according to four criteria:

1. The mutual position of subject, object and predicate: VSO, SVO or SOV (among about 200 languages he mentions only two languages with a dominant word order with the subject after the object);

2. The position of the preposition with respect to the noun (if it stands after the noun, it is called postposition);

3. The position of the adjective with respect to the noun;

4. The position of the genitive with respect to the governing noun.

Now in all four respects Sanskrit has no obligatory, but at best a most frequent word order:

1. The order SOV is most frequent (Staal pp. 51, 56, 58), but all six permutations SOV, SVO, OSV, OVS, VSO and VOS are equally grammatical (Staal, pp. 12 and 63).

2. Prepositions sometimes precede and sometimes follow their noun (Staal, p. 56); for the combination preposition-noun-attribute even the order attribute-preposition-noun is found (Staal, p. 57; compare Latin summa cum laude).

3. "Whether, finally, an Adjective precedes or follows the Noun it qualifies, may depend on the meaning of the Adjective. In other words, Adjectives would have to be grouped in two not necessarily disjunct classes." (Staal, p. 57).

4. "As to the relationship between Genitive and Noun, either of the two possible combinations is found." (Staal, p. 57).

Staal demonstrates his point chiefly for Sanskrit, but what he says about the liberty of word order in Sanskrit largely also holds for Latin and Greek, languages known to more of my readers (Staal, p. 60).

For languages such as Sanskrit, with an almost completely free word order, the usual kind of generative grammar, which generates the sentences immediately as ordered strings, is less suitable, since it does not only require otherwise unnecessary transformations to derive the other word orders from the word order assumed as basic, but also gives a syntactically unmotivated preference to one of the possible word orders (Staal, p. 12). Therefore Staal develops, especially for the description of Sanskrit and similar languages, an alternative kind of generative

grammar, in which first unordered sets with a structure of subsets are generated and order is only introduced in a later stage (since, after all, even in Sanskrit the ultimate sentences are ordered strings of words).

Instead of the familiar rewriting rules

$$S \rightarrow NP^{\wedge} VP$$
$$VP \rightarrow NP^{\wedge} V$$
$$NP \rightarrow (Det)^{\wedge}(S)^{\wedge} N$$

Staal starts with the rules

$$S \rightarrow \{NP, VP\}$$
$$VP \rightarrow \{NP, V\}$$
$$NP \rightarrow \{Det, S, N\} \quad \text{(p. 14)},$$

in which it is understood, that $\{X, Y\}$ is the same set as $\{Y, X\}$.

By these divagations about Sanskrit I do not intend to argue, that Esperanto has the same liberty of word order as Sanskrit, but only, that St. Clair's argument, that word order cannot be free in Esperanto, because it is not free in any natural language, does not hold water.

III THE NORM OF GRAMMATICALITY IN A CONSTRUCTED LANGUAGE

For a natural language the norm of grammaticality is the intuition of the native speakers.

For a constructed language a complete norm for the grammaticality of sentences in all possible cases is, as a rule, more difficult to give. Manders mentions (pp. 59-62) seven possible norms for correctness in Esperanto:

1. The authoritarian norm: the Fundamento de Esperanto;

2. The geographic norm: though it does not make sense to ask, in which country the best Esperanto is spoken, since Esperanto is based on the European languages, the common habits of the European languages and the usage of the European Esperantists should be taken as norm;

3. The literary norm, the usage of the best authors, especially Zamenhof;

4. The artistocratic norm, the usage of the more cultivated classes (not recognized in Esperanto);

5. The democratic norm, the usage of the majority of the Esperantists (only applicable, where it is not contrary to the Fundamento);

6. The logical norm, with only a limited value;

7. The esthetic norm, not recognized by Manders.

To these seven norms St. Clair wants to add an eighth norm: the linguistic universals. I agree with him, that the linguistic universals must manifest themselves in Esperanto too (unless Zamenhof would have given Esperanto a Fundamento contrary to some linguistic universal, e.g., if he had made Esperanto a postpositional VSO language, of which Greenberg gives no examples among the natural languages), but the linguistic universals seem to me superfluous as a separate norm. Linguistic universals are inherent in human speech capacity and so find naturally their way into the usage of any language, inclusive Esperanto, partially by the influence of the native language and partially because even the Esperantists who have succeeded in largely liberating themselves from the influence of their native languages cannot liberate themselves from the mechanism of their brains. E.g., one has observed an universal tendency to put long clauses at the end of the sentence (this is only a tendency, not a strict rule; not in every sentence the longest part of speech stands at the end, but in long texts one may expect to find a greater average length of the final parts of speech than of the initial and medial ones). In agreement with this I have observed in ten very different Esperanto texts, that the average length of the final parts of speech was almost always greater than that of the initial and medial parts of speech. I determined the average length of the initial, medial and final parts of speech for each text and each of five so-called complexities. What are complexities would lead too far. So I got 50 cases. In all these 50 cases except three, the average length of the final parts of speech turned out to be greater than that of the initial and medial parts of speech (Verloren van Themaat 2) p. 143). Though the works of Zamenhof (who was not among the explored authors) probably show the same tendency, this result should not be attributed to the example or the prescriptions of Zamenhof: their brains worked that way.

The authoritarian norm of a constructed language (more general than for Esperanto: the official prescriptions by the author, individual or collective, of the language, e.g., for Interlingua the Interlingua-English Dictionary by Gode and Interlingua, a grammar of the international language by Gode and Blair) would only be sufficient for the decision of the grammaticality of sentences in all instances, if the grammar of the language had been given in the form of a generative grammar. This has been done in Loglan. But most important constructed languages were published before the development of modern generative linguistics, so this method has to be supplemented by other methods.

Many rules not explicitly stated in the famous 16-rule fundamental grammar of Esperanto must be considered as rules of Esperanto, sometimes because the wording of the Fundamental Grammar implies them, more often because they are consistently applied in the Fundamental Exercises.

So Zamenhof states nowhere explicitly in the Grammar of the Fundamento de Esperanto, that a preposition should be put before, and not after the noun to which it belongs. But the word preposition implies

that it is put before the noun. Zamenhof always put the preposition before the noun and was perhaps not even aware of the possibility of a postpositional language. As far as I know, no Esperantist, not even one with a postpositional native language, has ever doubted that Esperanto is a prepositional language. So that Esperanto is a prepositional language, may be considered as a well-established fact.

St. Clair tries to prove his rules for word order in Esperanto by the convergent evidence of the usage in Esperanto and linguistic universals. This method is allowed, but only under two conditions:

1. As to the usage of Esperanto: that this usage is distilled from a great diversity of texts according to the native language of the author, text genre and stylistic ideal. E.g., in "The Britist Esperantist" one will find few inversions of the object (the object after subject and predicate in 89% of the cases (Verloren van Themaat 2, p. 45)), but this does not prove, that in Esperanto inversion of the object is unallowed. Other Esperanto texts, both from authors who are accustomed to inversion of the object by their native languages, e.g., Slaves and Hungarians, and from authors who consciously exploit the possibilities of Esperanto, e.g., Auld's La infana raso", show a quite other picture. With Auld 27.5% of all objects stand before subject and predicate; in "Hungara vivo" 16%.

2. That the linguistic universals truly treat order <u>rules</u> in natural languages and not mere statistical <u>predominancies</u>.

Let us now inspect, in how far his reasoning is correct in detail.

IV LIBERTY OF WORD ORDER IN ESPERANTO

Staal (pp. 68-69) mentions as an intermediate case between completely free word order and completely fixed word order the case, that <u>in the same construction</u> permutation of the constituents is allowed, if the grammatical relations are shown by the inflectional forms, but not, if they are not shown by the inflectional forms. Greenberg cites the example of Russian, where all six permutations of <u>Lenin Citiruet Marksa</u> are possible, because <u>Lenin</u> and <u>Marksa</u> are distinguished by their case endings (p. 268), but inversion is impossible in <u>Mat' ljubit doč'</u>, because <u>mat'</u> and <u>doč'</u> have the same form in nominative and accusative.

But another intermediate system between completely free and completely fixed word order is possible, namely that the order of the constituents is completely free in some constructions and completely fixed in other constructions. St. Clair (pp. 3-4) mentions 9 constructions, each of which has according to him a fixed order of constituents or at least a limited set of permutations of the constituents. It is at least logically possible, that in some of these constructions the elements can be freely permutated and in other ones the order of the constituents is fixed.

St. Clair speaks slightly misleadingly of "the position of the verb" (he intends the mutual position of subject, predicate and object) and asserts, that the two constructions SOV and OSV are ungrammatical. Now the presence of the accusative in Esperanto alone does not prove, that in Esperanto S, O and V can be freely permutated (Turkish has an accusative, and in it the verb stands obligatorily at the end of the sentence). But Zamenhof said in his congress speech of Washington (1910): "So for instance the elimination of the 'supersigns' and the accusative...would present a mutilation of the internal value of the language, to please its external spectators, elimination of necessary important sounds from the language and of free word order (underlined by me) and clarity...". So he introduced the accusative into Esperanto to make the word order free, at least with respect to the mutual position of subject, predicate and object, i.e., to make all their six permutations equally grammatical.

This is in agreement with Zamenhof's language usage. In the "Ekzercoj" of the Fundamento we find all six permutations of S, O and V. As one would expect, SVO is most frequent. We find one example of VSO: Mi jam havas mian ĉapelon; nun serĉu vi vian" (18) and one of VOS: "Sur tiuj ĉi vastaj kaj herboriĉaj kampoj paŝtas sin grandaj brutaroj, precipe aroj da bellanaj ŝafoj." (34). The three other orders are quite numerous: 14 examples of SOV (the order branded by St. Clair as ungrammatical!), 21 examples of OSV and 8 examples of OVS. The order OSV is also found with S and O, all both nouns: "La sepan tagon de la semajno Dio elektis, ke ĝi estu pli sankta ol la ses unuaj tagoj." (12) and "Johanon, Nikolaon, Erneston, Vilhelmon, Marion, Klaron kaj Sofion iliaj gepatroj nomas Johanĉjo (aŭ Joĉjo), Nikolĉjo (aŭ Nikoĉjo aŭ Nikĉjo aŭ Niĉjo), Erneĉjo (aŭ Erĉjo), Vilhelĉjo (aŭ Vilheĉjo aŭ Vilĉjo aŭ Viĉjo), Manjo (aŭ Marinjo), Klanjo kaj Sonjo (aŭ Sofinjo)," (38). It is true, that all examples of SOV in the Ekzercoj have a pronoun as object. But in other writings of Zamenhof we find the order SOV also with a noun object: "...tiam ni uzas la prepozicion je, kiu memstaran signifon ne havas." ("...then we use the preposition je, which does not have an independent meaning", Fundamenta Krestomatio, p. 255).

So St. Clair's assertion of the ungrammaticality of SOV and OSV runs against both Zamenhof's prescriptions and his usage.

There are even Esperanto texts in which the order SOV is more frequent than the order SVO. In Kreutzwald's "Kalevipoeg" I counted among all sentences with subject, predicate and object:

202 = 35% with order SVO	19 = 3.3% with order OVS
217 = 38% with order SOV	42 = 7.4% with order VSO
72 = 13% with order OSV	18 = 3.2% with order VOS

I counted discontinuous parts of speech as having the place of their last word, so for instance in

"Venis luno, lunjunulo,
.....
Volis Salme'n varbe svati."

("The moon,the moon youngster came, wanted to court Salme") (p. 25) I counted the place of volis svati as after Salme'n, and so the sentence as SOV. In sentences in which one part of speech must be suppleted from a former sentence, I counted this part of speech as standing at the beginning of the sentence, e.g., in

"Ŝpinos mi ŝpinaĵon oran,
Arĝentaĵo jn ame ligos
Kaj bobenojn kuprajn rulos"

(I shall spin a gold spinning, I shall lovingly bind silverwork, and wind copper clew" (p. 22) I counted "Arĝentaĵojn ame ligos" and "Kaj bobenojn kuprajn rulos" as having the order SOV. According to information given by the translator in a letter, in Estonian the dominant word order is SVO, but many deviations occur; in the original of "Kalevipoeg" both the orders SVO and SOV occur (perhaps also other ones), she has not explored with which frequency.

St. Clair's appeal to the linguistic universals relies on the alleged incompatibility of the word order SOV with well-established features of the word order in Esperanto, e.g., its prepositionality and its position of the relative clause after the modified noun. But Greenberg only says that languages with an obligatory or dominant order SOV are mostly postpositional. He does not exclude the possibility of a prepositional language in which the order SOV is allowed. Such a language is, e.g., Russian, a prepositional language, in which the dominant order is SVO, but the order SOV is allowed (with certain restructions, Greenberg, p. 268).

MacCawley's hypothesis that all languages with a surface structure SVO have a deep structure VSO has been severely and -- according to my opinion -- correctly criticized by A. Berman. She showed that at least for English, French, Italian, Spanish and Portuguese the VSO hypothesis complicates the description, since even the sentences in these languages which have VSO in surface structure must pass a SVO stage in their derivation, so that two inversions are needed instead of one (Berman, p. 29).

Moreover, the correctness of the VSO hypothesis is not to the point, since for Esperanto the most important alternative to a SVO deep structure is not a VSO deep structure, but an unordered set of S, V and O in the deep structure (compare Staal). That in other constructions in Esperanto, e.g., preposition -- noun, the constituents are not permutable, is no counterargument, since there is no contradiction in unordered sets of constituents which are themselves ordered strings of subconstituents. In Sanskrit in the presentation of Staal the deep structure of a sentence is an unordered set of words which are themselves ordered strings of letters.

Among the word order rules given by St. Clair for Esperanto the position of the preposition before the noun (even stricter than in

English, see his note 2!), the position of the article before the noun, the position of the relative clause after the modified noun and of the genitive after the noun are completely supported by usage. The position of the genitive after the noun is moreover a logical consequence of the face that the genitive is periphrased by a preposition.

The sentence initial position of the question marker does not even strictly hold in English, because there are sentences with more question markers, e.g., "Who does what?". With Auld and Boulton (1) and (2) there are a fair number of exceptions to the initial position of the question marker.

With Boulton they are almost always rhetorical questions, or at least questions in which ĉu (the marker of yes-no questions) or ĉu ne are often put at the end of the sentence.

> Nu, konsentite -- tamen, ĉu ne
> (Well, okay -- yet, but (Boulton 1, p. 23))
> kriterio
> skribinda, ĉu, en nia historio
> (a criterion
> worth to be noted, is it, in our history)
> (Boulton 1, p. 91)
> Via patro ne estas psikiatro, ĉu
> (Your father is not a psychiatre, is he?
> (Boulton 2, p. 18))
> ne temas pri ... infano? ĉantaĝo, ia publika skandalo, ĉu?
> (the matter was not ... a child? chantage, some public
> scandale, was it? (Boulton, 2, p. 18))
> Kaj mi pravas, ĉu, kredante vin normale sana?
> (And I am right, am I, in believing you normally healthy?
> (Boulton 2, p. 19))

The comparison of the Esperanto original (both Auld and Boulton are Britons!) with the English translation explains the final position of ĉu in Via patro ne estas psikiatro, ĉu?

Far more various are the motives for deviations with Auld, in agreement with Auld's usage subtle in many respects of the free word order in Esperanto, by no means only for rhyme and metrics (Verloren van Themaat 2), pp. 117-118).

In many cases the non-initial position of the interrogative parts of speech has the effect, that the first part of the sentence has a declarative character and only after the interrogative part of speech it gets an interrogative character.

> La solan celon kial ni komplikas?
> (Wherefore do we complicate the only purpose? (p.29))
> Note that the verse line remains metrical after the
> transposition of kial to the beginning of the sentence:

Kial la solan celon ni komplikas?

The anteposition of "la solan celon" serves chiefly to tie the sentence to the previous text; the verse line may be paraphrased as

> That (the procreation) is the only purpose...and why do we complicate it?

> VERo kaj REVo --
> ĉu trompo de spegulo?
> (Truth and dream--are they a fraud by a mirror? (p. 93))

First he makes the reader observe that VERo and REVo are anagrams; only afterwards he asks whether that is only a fraud by a mirror.

We also find exceptions to the order auxiliary--verb:

> "Malbenita, milfoje malbenita estu la intergenta malamo."
> ("Let the hate among the races be damned, thousand times be damned", Zamenhof, speech at the Congress in Geneve, 1906).

Utterly ill-founded is St. Clair's attempt to impose Esperanto the order noun-adjective. This order is in Esperanto not only not obligatory, but not even dominant: the most frequent order in Esperanto is adjective--noun. He seems to be inspired by a desire to make Esperanto a language in which the modifier always follows the modified word. But precisely in Greenberg, on which he bases himself, he could have read, that besides the two extreme types, in which in all constructions the modifier follows the modified or in all constructions the modifier precedes the modified, there are also many languages in which in some constructions the modifier precedes the modified and in other constructions the modifier follows the modified. In our own English we have both the constructions adjective--noun (modifier--modified) and preposition--noun (modified--modifier).

With respect to the negation, finally, Esperanto has not only negation of the entire proposition, but also of separate parts of speech. The negation ne then stands immediately before the word negated (Plena Gramatiko, 91).

As to gapping, it is remarkable, that in Esperanto even in "Kalevipoeg" only forward gapping is found.

V CONCLUSION: LIBERTY OF WORD ORDER IN THE NATURAL LANGUAGES AND ESPERANTO

We have seen, that Esperanto has a far smaller liberty of word order than Sanskrit, but--except with respect to the prepositions--a far greater liberty of word order than English. Indeed, I do not believe that the natural languages with which Esperanto is most comparable in its degree of liberty of word order, are Latin, Greek and

Sanskrit. Probably it is most similar to some Eastern European languages, but this question should be considered by linguists with a knowledge of both Esperanto and the Eastern European languages in question. S, O and V are more absolutely permutable in Esperanto than in Russian. Esperanto is strictly prepositional, like Russian is strictly prepositional and Hungarian strictly postpositional. As to its morphology Hungarian should have a greater freedom of permutation of S, O and V, since in Hungarian the accusative is formed by the strictly regular attachment of a suffix, whereas in Polish and Russian for many nouns nominative and accusative formally coincide. But in "Pola Esperantisto" I found even a slightly higher frequency of the position of the object not after subject and predicate (23%) than in Hungara Vivo (22%).

Its liberty with respect to the order of S, O and V and fixedness with respect to the position of the preposition is in agreement with Greenberg's assertion: "On the whole, the higher the construction in an immediate constituent hierarchy, the freer the order of the constituent elements" (p. 104). We do not bother about the question, whether Esperanto precisely agrees with any natural language in its degree of liberty of word order. It remains entirely inside the system of limitations and liberty of word order possible for the natural languages.

Notes

1. I am grateful to Dr. Verkuyl for the criticism on some details, and to Mr. Krüger for the correction of my English.

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